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ACTION ARA-01

INFO LOG-00 AMAD-01 CIAE-00 COME-00 DODE-00 DPR-01 EB-01
E-01 HA-09 H-01 INRE-00 INR-01 L-03 ADS-00
NSAE-00 NSCE-00 OMB-01 PA-01 PM-01 PRS-01 P-01
SNP-01 SP-01 SS-01 STR-20 TRSE-00 T-01 USIE-00
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P 171402Z DEC 91
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6945

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 13284

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, ECIN, VE
SUBJECT: COPEI HITS HARDER

REF: (A) CARACAS 12543 (B) CARACAS 11725

1. C - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SUMMARY. COPEI HAS RECENTLY INCREASED THE FREQUENCY AND HARSHNESS OF ITS CRITICISM OF THE PEREZ GOVERNMENT. PREPARATIONS FOR THE LOCAL ELECTIONS AT THE END OF 1992 ARE THE OSTENSIBLE REASON FOR THIS DEVELOPMENT, BUT A DESIRE TO PLAY TO PUBLIC APPREHENSIONS ABOUT A POSSIBLE "POWER VACUUM" IN THE MIDST OF A "CRISIS" MAY BE JUST AS IMPORTANT. END SUMMARY.

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COPEI INTENSIFIES ITS OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT

3. COPEI HAS RECENTLY BEGUN TO INTENSIFY ITS OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT. THIS DECISION IS PART OF PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL EDUARDO FERNANDEZ' STRATEGY TO IMPROVE BOTH COPEI'S AND HIS OWN IMAGE IN THE RUN-UP TO THE 1992 LOCAL AND 1993 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. FERNANDEZ AND HIS COHORTS ARE CRITICIZING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CAP'S ECONOMIC REFORM PROGRAM, THE GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO

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RESOLVE THE PROBLEM OF GROWING PUBLIC INSECURITY, AND ASPECTS OF CAP'S FOREIGN-POLICY MAKING. THE FIRST STEP IN INTENSIFYING COPEI'S OPPOSITION WAS DEPUTY PACIANO PADRON'S UNVEILING OF AN 80-POINT PLAN TO COMBAT INSECURITY (REF A). OTHER STEPS SOON FOLLOWED.

"NATIONAL SALVATION PLAN"

4. THE NEXT OCCURRED WHEN FERNANDEZ USED THE OCCASION OF A NOVEMBER 30 MEETING WITH CAP TO PRESENT HIM WITH A 12-POINT "PLAN OF NATIONAL SALVATION" INTENDED, IN THE COPEI LEADER'S WORDS, TO "RENEW (NATIONAL) CONFIDENCE IN THE COUNTRY'S DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND TO RESTORE THE RMGTS TO OPTIMISM AND HOPE." THE PLAN CALLED FOR CABINET CHANGES, NEW PROGRAMS TO HELP VENEZUELAN CHILDREN, IMPROVEMENTS IN PUBLIC SERVICES, A MORE PROFESSIONAL POLICE FORCE, BETTER PUBLIC TRANSPORT, GREATER FISCAL DISCIPLINE, GUARANTEES OF FINANCING FOR THE STATE OIL COMPANY, MORE STIMULUS TO FOREIGN INVESTMENT, GREATER EFFICACY IN SOCIAL SPENDING, AN END TO INFLATION, THE DEFINITION OF STRATEGIES OF SECTORAL DEVELOPMENT, AND A

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REFOCUSING OF FOREIGN POLICY STRESSING INTRA-HEMISPHERIC RELATIONS. SUMMING UP HIS PLAN FOR THE PRESS, FERNANDEZ OBSERVED THAT "THE BEST SOCIAL POLICY IS A GOOD ECONOMIC POLICY REACTIVATING THE COUNTRY'S PRODUCTIVE APPARATUS."

ENLARGED NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEETING

5. SUBSEQUENTLY, COPEI HELD AN ENLARGED NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEETING, DECEMBER 2-3, TO DISCUSS THE STATE OF THE COUNTRY AND COPEI'S PREPARATIONS FOR THE 1992 LOCAL ELECTIONS FOR GOVERNORS, MAYORS, AND CITY COUNCILMEN. PARTY OFFICIALS ADDRESSING THE MEETING ENGAGED IN STRONG CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT. FERNANDEZ LAMBASTED CAP, CHARGING THAT THE PRESIDENT HAD BECOME EVER MORE ISOLATED AND DEVALUED IN THE MINDS OF VENEZUELANS. JUMPING TO THE ECONOMIC REFORM PACKAGE, THE COPEI LEADER CHARACTERIZED IT AS "IMPORTED, ILL-CONCEIVED, BADLY ASSIMILATED, AND IMPLEMENTED AMID CONTRADICTIONS." FURTHERMORE, FERNANDEZ CONTINUED, CAP, OBSESSED BY "MACROECONOMIC INDICATORS," HAD FORGOTTEN ABOUT AVERAGE VENEZUELANS. FOR, FERNANDEZ NOTED, THE BEST SOCIAL POLICY WOULD BE A GOOD ECONOMIC POLICY GENERATING STABLE AND REMUNERATIVE EMPLOYMENT AND PROVIDING ADEQUATE HEALTH CARE AND EDUCATION. FERNANDEZ,

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STRESSING COPEI'S SUPPOSED VOCATION FOR CHANGE AND PROJECTING A COMBINATION OF REALISM AND OPTIFSM, CONCLUDED BY PROCLAIMING HIS PARTY'S READINESS AND ABILITY TO GOVERN THE COUNTRY.

6. FERNANDEZ' LIEUTENANTS JOINED IN THE CRITICISM OF CAP AND THE GOVERNMENT. ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL FOR ADMINISTRATION PACIANO PADRON RECOMMENDED THAT CAP DO
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THREE THINGS: DECREASE THE NUMBER OF HIS TRIPS ABROAD, ESPECIALLY AT A TIME OF BLOOD-LETTING IN THE STREETS AND RUMORS OF A COUP D'ETAT; GOVERN THE COUNTRY, WHICH WAS SUFFERING FROM HUNGER; AND CEASE GIVING THE NATIONAL PATRIMONY AWAY TO FOREIGNERS THROUGH ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS. DEPUTY SECRETARY GENERAL JOSE CURIEL ARGUED THAT COPEI HAD THE RESPONSIBILITY OF FILLING THE VACUUM OF LEADERSHIP WHICH CAP'S MANY TRIPS ABROAD AND THE INDIFFERENCE OF AD TO THE COUNTRY'S PROBLEMS HAD CREATED. IN THIS REGARD, CURIEL ALLEGED THAT CAP HAD ALREADY SPENT MORE THAN 240 DAYS OUTSIDE VENEZUELA SINCE HIS FEBRUARY, 1989 INAUGURATION.

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A GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY

7. COPEI'S NATIONAL COMMITTEE DURING ITS DECEMBER 9 WEEKLY MEETING CALLED ON CAP TO FORM A GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY TO MAKE THE "RECTIFICATIONS" (OF POLICY) NECESSARY FOR RESOLUTION OF THE CURRENT "CRISIS." IN A PRESS CONFERENCE FOLLOWING THE MEETING, FERNANDEZ CHARGED THAT "THE GOVERNMENT HAS FAILED AND SO IS ASKING FOR SUGGESTIONS FOR ALTERNATIVES," A REFERENCE TO CAP'S RECENT CHALLENGE TO CRITICS OF HIS ECONOMIC REFORM PACKAGE TO
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PROPOSE SOMETHING BETTER. FERNANDEZ THEN ELABORATED ON THE IDEA OF A GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY, NOTING THAT IT SHOULD BE COMPOSED OF "WORTHY" INDIVIDUALS POSSESSING THE QUALITIES OF INDEPENDENCE, HONESTY AND COMPETENCE. (HE ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT COPEI ITSELF WOULD NOT PARTICIPATE IN SUCH A GOVERNMENT, SINCE THAT WOULD VIOLATE ITS PROPER OPPOSITION ROLE.) FERNANDEZ ADDED THAT SUCH A GOVERNMENT'S PRIME OBJECTIVES SHOULD BE GUARANTEEING THE SECURITY OF ALL VENEZUELAN, ENDING INFLATION, LIMITING PUBLIC EXPENDITURES, ATTAINING GREATER EFFICIENCY IN SOCIAL SPENDING, AND ATTRACTING INVESTMENT. INSTEAD, FERNANDEZ CHARGED, THE GOV HAD BEEN ERRONEOUSLY CONCENTRATING ON MEGAPROJECTS BASED ON DEBT-EQUITY SWAPS, NON-TRADITIONAL EXPORTS, PUBLIC INVESTMENT TO STIMULATE THE ECONOMY, AND FOREIGN INVESTMENT, WHICH (HE CLAIMED) HAD FAILED TO ARRIVE IN SUFFICIENT QUANTITIES. FERNANDEZ ALSO CRITICIZED THE ADMINISTRATION FOR HAVING ALLEGEDLY DENIED STATE OIL COMPANY PDVSA INCOME ADEQUATE TO THE FINANCING OF ITS ON-GOING EXPANSION PROGRAM.

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CAP'S FOREIGN POLICY STYLE

8. COPEI HAS CONTINUED TO HIT CAP REPEATEDLY FOR HIS MANY ABSENCES FROM THE COUNTRY. COPEI'S ATTITUDE BUILDS ON, AND CONTRIBUTES TO, GROWING PUBLIC CRITICISM OF SEVERAL RECENT GOV FOREIGN POLICY INITIATIVES (REF B). COPEI'S NATIONAL COMMITTEE AT ITS NOVEMBER 25 WEEKLY MEETING ISSUED A STATEMENT LAMBASTING THE PRESIDENT ON THIS GROUND. FERNANDEZ CHARGED AT THE PARTY'S ENLARGED NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEETING, DECEMBER 2-3, THAT THE PRESIDENT'S MANY ABSENCES HAD CONTRIBUTED TO A "VACUUM OF
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POWER" WHICH MANY WITH ANTI-DEMOCRATIC PRETENSIONS WERE ATTEMPTING TO FILL. FERNANDEZ ALSO CRITICIZED CAP ON FOREIGN POLICY GROUNDS DURING THE DECEMBER 9 PRESS CONFERENCE. FERNANDEZ, REJECTING THE "INTERNATIONAL BUTTERFLY STYLE" OF FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING, CALLED INSTEAD FOR THE COUNTRY TO CONCENTRATE ON RELATIONS WITH COLOMBIA, THE ANDEAN PACT COUNTRIES, AND THE UNITED STATES, CANADA AND MEXICO. OTHER COPEI OFFICIALS SUCH AS PARTY PRESIDENT HILARION CARDOZO, NATIONAL MEDIA COORDINATOR LEONARDO FERRER, NATIONAL ELECTION COMMISSION PRESIDENT FELIPE MONTILLA, AND SECRETARY FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS JOSE RODRIGUEZ ITURBE FOLLOWED FERNANDEZ' LEAD. THAT COPEI'S ENLARGED NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEETING OCCURRED DURING CAP'S LENGTHY SOJOURN IN CARTAGENA, COLOMBIA, FOR THE G-3, RIO GROUP AND ANDEAN PACT "SUPER-SUMMIT", LENT RESONANCE TO FERNANDEZ' CRITICISM.

9. SEVERAL MEDIA ARTICLES IN RECENT WEEKS HAVE UNFAVORABLY COMPARED THE NUMBER OF CAP'S TRIPS ABROAD (45, REPORTEDLY) TO THOSE OF PRESIDENT BUSH AND OTHER WORLD LEADERS. OTHER ARTICLES HAVE CITED THE COSTS OF SUCH RECENT FOREIGN POLICY INITIATIVES AS HOSTING EXILED HAITIAN PRESIDENT ARISTIDE AND THE G-15 SUMMIT (BOTH REPORTEDLY MORE THAN ONE MILLION DOLLARS). IN GENERAL, VENEZUELA'S "FOREIGN AID PROGRAM" OF ASSISTANCE TO VARIOUS CARIBBEAN AND CENTRAL AMERICAN COUNTRIES HAS BEEN SLAMMED. ALTHOUGH COPEI IS LOATH TO DO ANYTHING TO LIMIT THE PRESIDENT'S FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING PREROGATIVES, IN ANTICIPATION OF ITS OWN VICTORY IN THE 1993 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, THE PARTY HAS APPARENTLY DECIDED NOT TO HESITATE TO MAKE POLITICAL POINTS FROM CAP'S GROWING
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VULNERABILITY IN THE FOREIGN POLICY AREA. MONTILLA,
ALTHOUGH GRACIOUSLY ALLOWING THAT CAP WOULD MAKE AN
EXCELLENT FOREIGN MINISTER (COMMENT: A ROLE HE ALREADY
PLAYS, IN REA
ETY), EVEN THREATENED THAT COPEI WOULD VOTE
AGAINST CAP'S PLANNED TRIP TO CHINA NEXT SPRING. HE ADDED
THAT COPEI CONGRESSMEN WOULD HENCEFORTH CALL IN THE
FOREIGN MINISTER FOR QUESTIONS EACH TIME CAP TRAVELED
ABROAD.

COMMENT

10. FERNANDEZ HAS EVIDENTLY DECIDED TO PLAY TO GROWING
PUBLIC APPREHENSION ABOUT THE EMERGENCE OF A POSSIBLE
"POWER VACUUM" IN INTENSIFYING ATTACKS ON THE GOVERNMENT.
DESPITE THE WHIRLWIND OF ACTIVITY, THE PARTY HAS ADVANCED
FEW IF ANY REALLY SUBSTANTIVE PROPOSALS. FERNANDEZ IS AT

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	SNP-01	SP-01	SS-01	STR-20	TRSE-00	T-01	USIE-00
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LEAST SUCCEEDING IN GARNERING A GOOD DEAL OF PUBLICITY.

COPEI'S "PRE-CAMPAIGN" IS GETTING INTO GEAR. SKOL

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